MUSCLE SHOALS MUSIC NOW

Songwriter Showcase featuring Grammy-winner Gary Nichols, Angela Hacker and Lucie Tiger

The Muscle Shoals area features an extraordinary range of live music events every week that surprise and delight, offering up new and unexpected gems. The 3rd annual Hog Creek Cotillion was just such an event - it exceeded our expectations and proved to be an extraordinary evening. We were lured by the promise of an evening of great music, fine food, and inventive cocktails, and despite a stormy night whipped up by the latest hurricane, we ventured a few miles beyond the city limits.

Hosted by Tom and Caren Gallaher, the Cotillion is held at Hog Creek Farm which has been in Tom's family since the early 1800s. A short drive from the Shoals, it's the perfect setting for this unique event. The evening started with hand-crafted cocktails while local celebrity chef, Josh Quick of Odette, masterfully served up a roasted whole hog plus a delicious array of sides. After enjoying a repast fit for royalty, we ventured up to the second storey of a large barn and it was here that we were transported to another time and place, thanks to the live music that was the highlight of the evening. The bill featured Steinza, Sam Burchfield and The Scoundrels, and for us, it was The Pine Hill Haints that shone. An American traditional bluegrass band that's flickered with hints of folk, honky tonk and country rock, the Haints band members describe their unique southern roots music as 'Alabama Ghost Music' and seeing them play in a large barn in the middle of the countryside under dim lights in the middle of a storm brought this description to life.

The lineup of the band is somewhat fluid but the band members at the Cotillion were Jamie Barrier (vocals, guitar, fiddle, harmonica), Katie Barrier (washboard, mandolin, saw), Brian Borden (snare) plus Matt Bakula (washtub, tenor banjo) and Justin Ward (accordion, trombone). The Haints often perform music that they consider 'dead' in the modern world and use instruments that hark back to days of old, swapping the instruments amongst themselves with a carefree abandon that adds to their 'ghost music'. The Haints are definitely a band to catch when you're in the Shoals or when they're on tour.

Another gem that we caught recently was Mac McAnally, who played alongside the University of North Alabama Symphony Orchestra at Norton Auditorium. A songwriter with an impressive body of work, McAnally knows how to write a song or two. Born in Red Bay Alabama, he wrote his first song at fifteen and moved to the Shoals as a session player a year or so later. When he played some of his own songs in the studio, he so impressed producers Clayton Ivey and Terry Woodford that they shopped his songs to the likes of Hank Williams Jr. By the time he was twenty years old, McAnally had recorded his first album and from that point forward, he attracted both popular and critical acclaim for his songwriting along with Billboard and Grammy achievements for both singles and albums.

By the time he was twenty-one, McAnally formed a long-lasting professional connection with Jimmy Buffett, co-writing with Buffett and playing in his Coral Reefer Band. A longtime member of the band, McAnally toured with Jimmy Buffett until his death in 2023. McAnnally has the same relaxed style as Buffett, one that could be described as easy-going urbane with just the right amount of repartee to keep the audience amused between songs. On stage, McAnally frequently flips between guitar and piano, prompting him to quip that the short path between his instruments is the extent of the show's choreography.

At his concert, McAnally revealed the extraordinary range of his songwriting, which swings from songs that are sad and mellow like 'When Trouble Comes Around' through to the funky 'Junk Cars' and the crazy, upbeat 'Zanzibar'. He proudly noted that the bulk of his songs have been written within 10 miles of Muscle Shoals and he finished his set with two hit songs he wrote for other artists including Buffett's 'It's My Job' and Kenny Chesney's 'Back Where I Came From'.

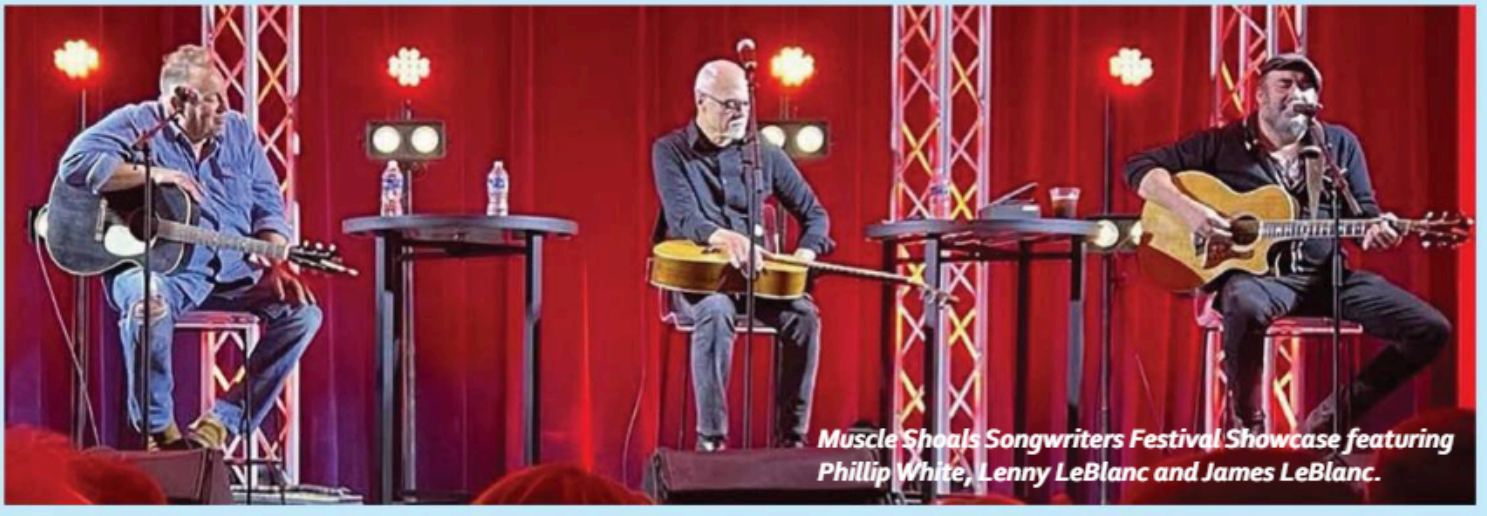
A key highlight each year is the Muscle Shoals Songwriters Festival and this year's festival attracted more songwriters than ever before, both local and interstate plus songwriters from abroad. Over the years, the festival has attracted Grammy-award winning and hit

songwriters as well as artist-songwriters including John Paul White, Emily Shackleton, Tom Douglas, Walker Hayes, Spooner Oldham and Phillip White.

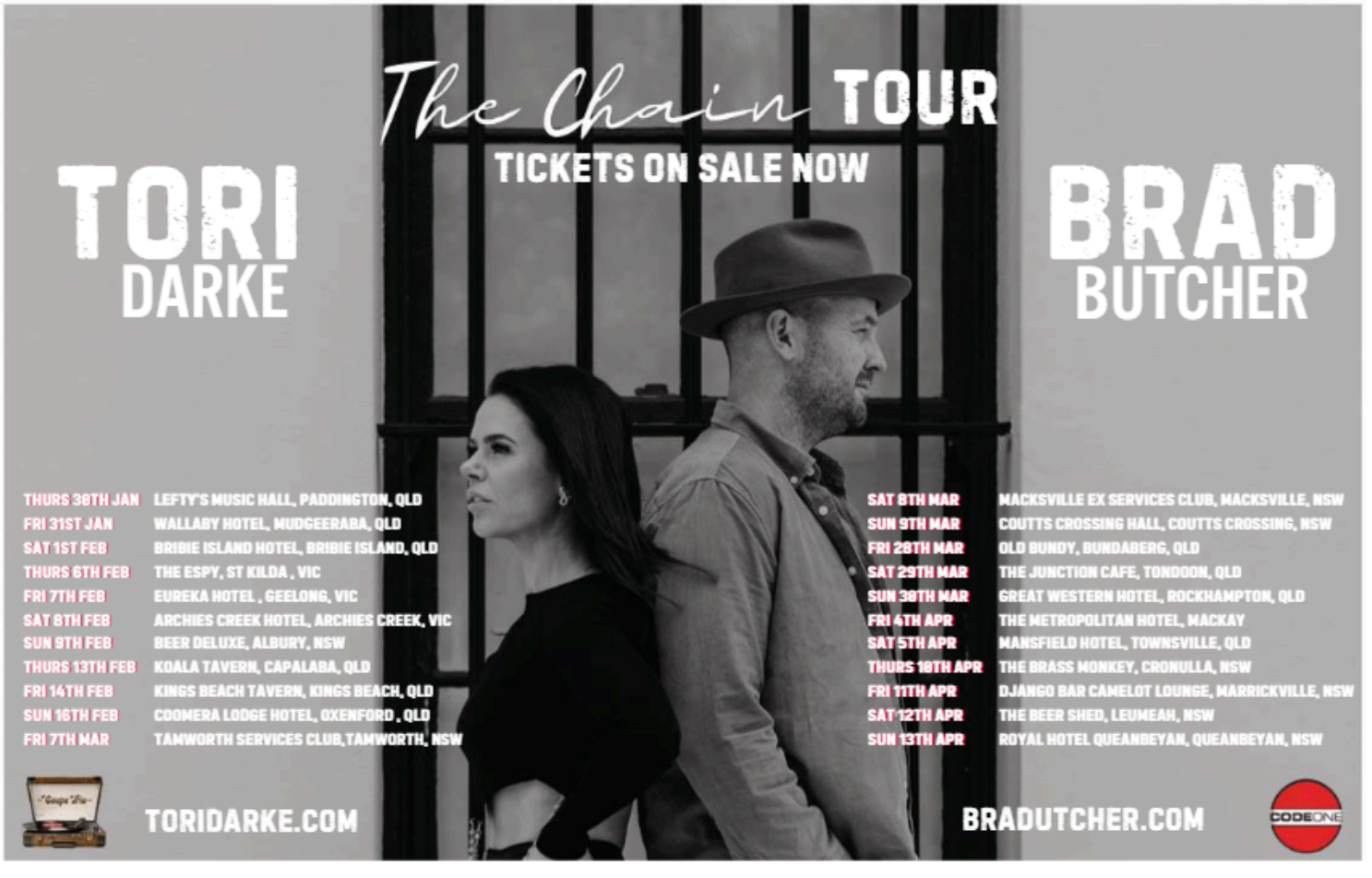
For songwriters to have the opportunity to meet and listen to songwriters of this calibre is invaluable and credit is due to the generosity of career songwriters and artist songwriters who share their stories plus the successes, trials and challenges of songwriting in this decade. The festival also features seminars with business leaders from across the music industry including organisations like Sound Royalties and the Mechanical Licensing Collective.

For both established and emerging songwriters and artist-songwriters, the Muscle Shoals Songwriters Festival is an important festival not to be missed and Muscle Shoals Music Now can arrange side gigs for songwriters during their stay in the Shoals. Reach out via Instagram (@muscleshoalsmusicnow).

2025 is going to be a great year for Muscle Shoals Music Now. Our Songbird Songwriter Showcase sessions have grown to the point where we've garnered a much sought after Friday night spot plus we're spreading our wings and adding Songbirds on Tour sessions further afield in Tennessee. We're also planning some cool Sunset Sessions in downtown and a Muscle Shoals Music Now takeover over at the legendary Whiskey Jam in Nashville! Happy New Year y'all!



Muscle Shoals Songwriters Festival Showcase featuring Phillip White, Lenny LeBlanc and James LeBlanc.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TORI DARKE
BRAD BUTCHER
THURS 30TH JAN LEFTY'S MUSIC HALL, PADDINGTON, QLD
FRI 31ST JAN WALLABY HOTEL, MUDGEERABA, QLD
SAT 1ST FEB BRIBIE ISLAND HOTEL, BRIBIE ISLAND, QLD
THURS 6TH FEB THE ESPY, ST KILDA , VIC
FRI 7TH FEB EUREKA HOTEL , GEELONG, VIC
SAT 8TH FEB ARCHIES CREEK HOTEL, ARCHIES CREEK, VIC
SUN 9TH FEB BEER DELUXE, ALBURY, NSW
THURS 13TH FEB KOALA TAVERN, CAPALABA, QLD
FRI 14TH FEB KINGS BEACH TAVERN, KINGS BEACH, QLD
SUN 16TH FEB COOMERA LODGE HOTEL, OXENFORD , QLD
FRI 7TH MAR TAMWORTH SERVICES CLUB,TAMWORTH, NSW
SAT 8TH MAR MACKSVILLE EX SERVICES CLUB, MACKSVILLE, NSW
SUN 9TH MAR COUTTS CROSSING HALL, COUTTS CROSSING, NSW
FRI 28TH MAR QLD BUNDY, BUNDABERG, QLD
SAT 29TH MAR THE JUNCTION CAFE, TONDOON, QLD
SUN 30TH MAR GREAT WESTERN HOTEL, ROCKHAMPTON, QLD
FRI 4TH APR THE METROPOLITAN HOTEL, MACKAY
SAT 5TH APR MANSFIELD HOTEL, TOWNSVILLE, QLD
THURS 10TH APR THE BRASS MONKEY, CRONULLA, NSW
FRI 11TH APR DJANGO BAR CAMELOT LOUNGE, MARRICKVILLE, NSW
SAT 12TH APR THE BEER SHED, LEUMEAH, NSW
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